Colonialism, Trauma and Affect: Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* as Oduche's Return

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, which deals with the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, as a trauma narrative. It argues that, though the novel has generally and profitably been read as exemplifying the problem of cultural conflict in Africa, seen through the prism of the writer's last memoir, its primary aim is clearly to map out a genealogy of a certain "African Post-colonial structure of feeling," in which the fracture of traditional society in the face of colonialism dramatized in the novel is seen as, to a large extent, a symptom of the *foundational trauma* of Umuaro's genesis. Thus, it is argued that Achebe deploys the fiction-genre as a discursive site for mourning the loss of a Pre-colonial cultural and political space. However, the paper does not read trauma in terms of the *repetition compulsion complex* proposed by Freud and Post-structuralist trauma studies, but instead, it attends to the ways in which the novel rehistoricizes trauma as a way of *working through* it. It considers the act of writing the novel

itself as part of that process of *working out* the historical trauma of *Post-colonial affective dysfunction*.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I look at Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* from the perspective of trauma theory. I must confess to having previously been quite suspicious of this approach, largely for two reasons. It seemed to me that the theory, in its shift from a purely psychoanalytical model to a cultural theory, it was mostly associated with Holocaust Studies, making it too culturally and event specific to be easily transferrable to the African colonial and post-colonial contexts. Moreover, it did not seem ethical to transfer a theory specifically associated with a particular horrendous event to the cultural analysis of African literature. I was aware that both Aimé Césaire (1972) and Frantz Fanon (2001) had made connections between the inhumanity of Trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism and the Holocaust, but I did not feel that was sufficient ground on which to universalize the terms of what was a historically specific experience of suffering.

However, reading Chinua Achebe's memoir, *There was a Country*, has persuaded me that one could use the concepts developed within trauma theory to shed light on some of the harrowing historical experiences in Africa and their representation in cultural texts, for example that of the genocide in Biafra that Achebe felt compelled to return to in his memoir many years after the event. Still more, having begun to engage with trauma theory more deeply, it has become evident that a number of scholars have now started to consider and explore this area in earnest. Indeed, one of them, Ogaga Ifowodo contends, and rightly so in my view, that whilst 'postcolonial literary and cultural theory has produced an astonishing body of work that explores the politico-cultural dimension of Postcoloniality, it has, regrettably, lagged sorely behind in the

psychological sphere. (2013, p. x) That is true indeed and critics of African literature need to engage more seriously with this important area of critical and cultural theory. For those who wish to do so, there are some useful emerging frameworks, such as that of 'multidirectional memory' advanced by Michael Rothberg (2009) which sets Holocaust memory in the context of decolonisation and Post-coloniality, enabling a productive and ethical engagement with historical global trauma narratives.

It is within this transnational and transcultural ethics of trauma that I approach Achebe's work. I view trauma theory as a mode of conceptualising the *transcultural multidirectional memory of trauma* and accessing the historical, transcultural and transnational archives of trauma and its diverse cultural analyses to illuminate particular experiences and representations of trauma. Applying this approach to Achebe's novel, *Arrow of God*, so is my contention in this paper, enables us to go beyond the conventional readings of the novel which often depict it in terms of the colonial conflict model, whereby it is seen as representing the conflict of tradition and colonial modernity and/or as an account of how the protagonist's *hubris* aids the downfall of his society and the triumph of colonialism. On the contrary, I argue that attention to the structure of trauma in the novel reveals that, though colonialism is largely to blame for the demise of traditional Igbo society in the novel, the society's inadequate response to the external intrusion is itself a symptom of the *foundational trauma* accompanying the formation of Umuaro as a polity. In this respect, colonialism is a secondary trauma that accentuates the original trauma. Additionally, the colonial triumph inserts within it the Igbo memory of tragic loss that will in time work itself through as the impetus for decolonisation. In turn, as Achebe observes, from the perspective of the Post-colonial formation, decolonisation too failed adequately to resolve the historical trauma of colonialism, making the Post-colonial formation an unworked-through

pathology. It can thus be asserted that Achebe uses the cultural resources of his Post-colonial location to forge a novelistic discourse of healing and working through the founding traumas at the heart of the Post-colonial formation.

As mentioned earlier these insights have to some considerable extent arisen from reading Achebe's memoir, *There was a Country*, which evidently is a witness narrative account of a traumatic history; and, for Achebe, that history includes the terrain covered in his fictional work, especially *Arrow of God*. I was fascinated by the ambiguity in the first part of the title: "There was a Country," which, of course refers to the subtitle of the book "Biafra," but as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that Biafra is one of several countries, including the Post-colonial, Colonial, and Pre-colonial Nigeria in which Achebe locates himself. The connection between the memoir and his fiction can be seen in the reappearance of some of the topics covered in the former in the latter, for example, that of Warrant Chiefs. He remarks:

> Britain's indirect rule was a great success in northern and western Nigeria. […] [I]n the Igbo land [it] proved far more challenging to implement. [It] functioned through a newly created and incongruous establishment of "warrant chiefs" – a deeply flawed arrangement that effectively confused and corrupted the Igbo democratic spirit. (2)

This reiteration of the problem explored in *Arrow of God* in the context of an examination of the failure of the Nigerian Post-colonial state and the legitimization of Biafra's right to self-determination offers compelling evidence that the universe of the novel and that of Post-colonial Africa are intertwined.

Thus, Achebe's novels, such as *Arrow of God*, function as historical narratives where the similarity between fiction and history is centered on the continuation of a certain *dis-ease*, a pathology that, in his 1960 novel, he defines as being "no longer at ease." In this context, the question of trauma in Achebe's work must be seen as focused on this fundamental psychosocial "unease" or "disease" which becomes the object of what might be defined as a *writing-therapy*. In Achebe's view, the past is actively constitutive of the present; and, to that extent, unravelling the historical formation of the trauma manifest in the contemporary formation is a pre-requisite for the curative transformation of the existing order. So, the question Achebe seems to be addressing in the novel is: "what happened in Umuaro on the eve of colonial rule and how has that continued to affect African selfhood and socio-political formation?" He also seems to be asking a related question: "was the colonial encounter the origin of the *affective dis-ease* in question or was it itself a symptom?"

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe bears witness to the foundational and historical wound of Post-colonial Nigeria and Africa. As he puts it in *There was a Country*, that trauma manifests itself in "the postcolonial disposition [that] is a result of people who have lost the habit of ruling themselves." (2) Indeed, the novel can be said to demonstrate that it is not only the habit of self-rule that has been lost, but also that of the art of ethical leadership such as exercised by and entrusted to the ruling Ezeulus, predicated on the effective management of contradiction, complexity and ambivalence. That loss is a product of a personal, historical and foundational trauma. Dominik LaCapra makes a useful distinction between *transhistorical* or *foundational trauma* and *historical trauma*, regarding the former as engendered at the mythological beginnings of a given people's national formation, and thus only available for perpetual ritual redress; and the latter as emerging within historical temporality and hence amenable to being

transcended. (LaCapra xiv) The distinction is applicable to Achebe's novel. The regular ritual pledges and expressions of devotion to the deity Ulu evince a memorialization of the crisis that engendered the founding of Ulu and Umuaro. The historical trauma is evident in the psychosocial and political impact of the advent of colonialism.

However, it is noteworthy that the novel complicates LaCapra's distinction between the two modalities of trauma – it historicizes the *transhistorical or foundational* and *historical traumas*, perhaps, as a way of demystifying the crisis of Post-colonial formation by presenting it as an entirely historical process explicable by the procedures of historical analysis and therefore curable. Furthermore, the trauma of Post-colonial formation can be seen as *foundational* in the sense that it is secreted in the very grounding of the Post-colonial polity in the preceding colonial one. The placing of the Post-colonial period in a broader historical temporality also contests the view that African history only starts with the European arrival on the continent. For Achebe African history, though overcome by such forces, precedes and subsists in them. It is that tension that generates the struggle for political decolonization as well as the Post-colonial writer's project of "writing back to the empire."2

The novel also helps us rethink the nature of the traumatic event itself. Building on Sigmund Freud's notion that trauma is a *repetition compulsion* and its reworking by Cathy Caruth, Ato Quayson in *Calibrations* proposes that trauma in African literature should be seen as a *symbolization compulsion* of the primary event. (Quayson 76-98, Freud 243-258, Caruth, 2-4), There is no doubt that trauma generally involves the repetition and return of the original event. I would however suggest that we confine the concept of repetition and return to the actual experience of trauma, for instance, in the way in which it appears in the formation of

subjectivities and formations in Post-colonial Africa. We must refrain from extending this dimension to representations of trauma, particularly in written trauma narratives.

My view is that in such texts, for example, *Arrow of God*, the intention behind the representation is precisely to transcend the traumatic event through its symbolization. That is not a matter of compulsion as of agency: Achebe *chooses* to resymbolize the traumatic events of the past. It might help if we considered a different tradition of thinking about trauma, that of *Logotherapy*, advanced by Viktor Fankl in, for instance, *Man's Search for Meaning*. In keeping with the Existentialist tradition in which he is working, Frankl defines trauma as a crisis of meaning and one that can only be resolved by the subject's re-situation in a project of self-renewal. (Frankl 104-105) I would like to suggest that what Achebe is doing in writing *Arrow of God* is not to repeat the trauma of colonization, but rather to address the *deficit of meaning* in Post-colonial existence as regards the relationship between the subject, the social and history. So, the novel should be seen as not repeating the original trauma as such, but rather as resymbolizing it, in order, to borrow from LaCapra, to *work through* the original event, linking historical analysis with a utopic vision. It is in that way that we can avoid reproducing the Post-structuralist sublime, whereby the mastery of the trauma is constantly differed, something that LaCapra has rightly decried in Caruth's work on trauma. (LaCapra 68)

It would be disingenuous to rule out completely the presence of repetition in Achebe's novel: there is re-enactment of the original trauma in *Arrow of God* to some degree, principally at the level of both the protagonist's and Umuaro's relationship to the past as well as that of Achebe, as a writer. However, the act of writing the past, which invariably involves re-writing cannot be reduced easily to the notion of repetition, unless, of course, we rephrase the proposition and consider such writing as *staging-repetition in difference*. That is a more apt

description of what we are presented with in *Arrow of God*, in that it does preserve the *ontological distance* between the time of the original event and that of its re-enactment and also the distinction between the differing functions of the two moments in the production of traumatized subjectivity – the first cuts the wound and the second re-opens it. (Levinas 36) The first instance is historical or foundational in which the protagonist appears as a subject without agency and the second is the 'now' or present of the subject where the re-representation of trauma functions as an attempt by the subject to come to terms with it as an exercise of agency. However, that may not be true of the clinical presentation of trauma.

Furthermore, in its construction and reconstruction of historical trauma, *Arrow of God* functions neither as a historical nor as allegorical fiction as such, but rather as a rehistoricization of traumatic structures of feeling and an opening up of possibilities for the future. (Williams 129-135) It is in this particular context that the article employs LaCapra's characterization of two aspects of trauma: the first focusing on the idea that the manifestation of trauma or its representation involves *acting out* the trauma; and the second, that it also entails *working through* the trauma. (LaCapra 65-66) This model illuminates the historicity of Post-colonial trauma narratives such as *Arrow of God*. Thus, the novel can be read as reinventing the historical trauma, since it is not, in fact, strictly speaking, a historical narrative. Yet, the reinvention of trauma such as we find in literary narratives is no less truthful than obtains in biographical and historical accounts. (LaCapra 65-66) Literary narratives abstract general historical structures of feelings which historical accounts might not capture in their concern with factual truth. In the particular context of *Arrow of God*, Achebe's aim is not to retrieve an accurate historical account, but rather to recover the main *affective cartography* of the moment of the colonial encounter and retrace its subsequent development into a residual presence in the Post-colonial

formation. However, that is not an end in itself; it is a preliminary phase in the revalorization of the colonial as well as the Post-colonial experience from the perspective of a radical Post-colonial consciousness.

In that sense, following LaCapra's model, it can be said that the novel serves as a therapeutic means of resolving the original trauma rather than just a restaging of it. In examining the ways in which trauma is represented in the novel, for analytical purposes, we need to isolate three terrains of active manifestation: the biographical and psychosocial personal space of Ezeulu, the national-territorial space of Umuaro, and that of Achebe's Post-colonial location. These locations must not, however, be regarded as distinct, but interconnected.

EZEULU, PERSONAL TRAUMA AND THE POISONED CHALICE OF PRIESTHOOD

Right from the start we encounter Ezeulu as a troubled figure, not quite at ease with himself and his role as the Chief Priest of Ulu. That condition has to do primarily with the intrusion of past traumas on his role as Chief Priest as well with the crisis fomented by colonialism. One of his official functions is to look out for signs of the new moon, so he can authorize the beginning of important festivals, but this seemingly innocuous chore is complicated by the fact that it is also associated with the childhood trauma of his mother's mental breakdown and the violent manner in which she would be restrained on such occasions. (2) Ezeulu's fear is reported thus:

> He was now an old man but the fear of the new moon which he felt as a little boy still hovered around him. It was true that when he became the Chief Priest of Ulu the fear was often overpowered by

> the joy of his high office; but it was not killed. It lay on the ground
> in the grip of joy. (2)

Each new moon is an occasion for the repetition of the childhood trauma, but that trauma is not only personal--it also shows how a traditional signifier of a new life for the whole of Umuaro, is for the protagonist an overdetermined site which, among others, reproduces and intensifies the haunting past. In this way, the moon, belongs to two different representational systems–that of the formation of Ezeulu's personal trauma, on the one hand, and that of his public role as the Chief Priest of Umuaro, on the other, with opposing meanings in the two locations and embodying the tension between the private and the public within the formation of Ezeulu's identity. The performance of his public role is itself traumatized by the fact that the moment of spiritual renewal for the nation is compromised by the Chief Priest's failure to achieve that personally, as he represses the trauma rather than *working through* it.

The duality also highlights the limitations of the role of Chief Priest. It is also part of his inheritance as an individual and as a priest: it is evident that despite being a great medicine man and a most successful priest in his time, Ezeulu's father was not able to cure his wife or mitigate the effects of her mental breakdowns and Ezeulu himself is unable to excise the troubling memory of the moon's association with his mother's illness. In creating a priest of Ulu who is partly flawed and whose performance of duty is troubled by the weight of personal trauma, Achebe complicates the nature of the national agency of revivification and leadership. That demonstrates that the human embodiment and mediation of the divine will can materially affect the message. Certainly, the memory of his mother's illness interferes with Ezeulu's priestly duties.

Not only is the protagonist tormented by the memory of his mother's madness, but also that of his father's priesthood. He was universally regarded as the most completely formed Chief Priest in the history of Umuaro. In contrast, Ezeulu is constitutively inadequate, in that he has the powers of a priest, but not of a medicine man--which have been allocated to his step-brother. It is suggested that he is resentful of this partial embodiment of the ideal priestly subjectivity. The dispersal of priestly powers is advanced as one of the contributing factors to Ezeulu's insecurity. He seems to perceive his half-brother as a possible rival, given that the latter has curative as well as magical powers. Rather than work through this seemingly essential lack, Ezeulu compounds it by the blatant display of antagonism towards his step-brother and his resentment of his eldest son's friendship with him, all of which suggest a deep-seated fear of being transplanted and replaced by his step-brother. So, what might be regarded as an expression of the *Oedipal Complex*, a son's jealousy and hatred of the father over the latter's superior potency, transmutes into a constraining sibling rivalry, further deepening Ezeulu's sense of an inherited complex of handicaps. That complex leads to his defensiveness and aggression, both domestically and publically.

Moreover, the feeling of inadequacy explains Ezeulu's propensity for self-inflation. When he first appears in the novel, we are told that he enjoyed gripping younger people extra hard in a handshake to show that, in spite of his age, he had retained his youthful vigor. Furthermore, his refusal to eat the extra ritual yam, missed when he is imprisoned by Winterbottom, can also be read, as it has often, as an example of a studied stubbornness that is engendered by a deep sense of psychological injury. So too is his refusal to take constructive criticism, even from his trusted friend, Akuebue. (133-134) Often critics have attributed this behavior to an essential imperfection of character, which has sometimes been perceived as an elaboration of the

Aristotelian structure of tragedy. There is no doubting that in spite of his many positive attributes, Ezeulu is a flawed character. However, it can be contended that the main point of the novel is not to reduce his behavior to some innate, and, therefore, unchangeable nature, because that would be playing into the kind of Manichean logic that characterizes the colonial description of the Africans we get from Winterbottom and Wright, but rather to present it as product of his own formation as an individual and the effects of particular experiences on his psyche. Thus in Achebe's novel, character is not an essence, but a product of experience – a formation.

Through Ezeulu, Achebe illustrates the psycho-social formation of personality in Pre-colonial African society. Ezeulu, is an example of how Achebe employs psychological characterization to contest the essentialist colonial representation of African subjectivity in literature, seen, for instance, in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, a novel that he has often criticized. In this respect, *Arrow of God* continues the contestatory project of *Things Fall Apart* where the main character's weaknesses are ultimately ascribed to the trauma of abject childhood poverty and the embarrassment of having had a father who was publicly acknowledged as a social failure. Like Okonkwo, Ezeulu's seeming arrogance and fear of being thought weak are symptoms of a traumatic upbringing that has forced him to cultivate a public persona of strength and self-sufficiency, whilst bearing a repressed lack of self-confidence.

In addition to personal and familial trauma, there is also a constitutive lack in the relationship between the office of the Chief Priest and its deity Ulu. The absence of clarity in the power-relations between the Chief Priest and his deity does a lot to contribute to Ezeulu's lack of confidence in himself and his role as a priest. Within the religious traditions and practices of Umuaro, the Priest of Ulu is regarded as a messenger who delivers what Ulu says and has very little room for mediation. Ezeulu must observe all the set rituals of the deity and ensure that they

are carried out as prescribed at the founding of the institution. He wonders if he has any power at all in the relationship. We are told that: "Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and crops, therefore, over the people he wondered if it were real." (3) The fact that Ezeulu seems unsure of the exact nature of the connection between him and the deity in determining the message bespeaks not only his personal limitations, but the general lack of clarity in that relationship. Ulu does not speak clearly and the Priest needs to decipher the signs of Ulu's speech, which leaves a lot of room for his own interpretation and, indeed, self-doubt.

As Ezeulu meditates on the relative scope of his power to that of his deity's, he recognizes that Ulu also depends on his cooperation in implementing his will and, as such, he is not just a "watchman" – he is vital to the production of the message and the efficacy of its transmission. He tells himself: "No! The Chief Priest of Ulu is more than that, he should be more than that, if he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival--no planting and no reaping." (3) Evidently, there is a profound deficiency in the design of the priesthood–it is ambivalent. That provides the opportunity for both fidelity as well as transgression. In Ezeulu, it produces the desire not just to be a passive vehicle of divine will, but its active determiner. Thus, rather than being merely a case of Ezeulu's inordinate desire for power, it is about how an ambivalent religious structure allows flexibility in the very interpretation of the degree of power between deity and priest. However, in the hands of an insecure man, hampered by a personal trauma, such as Ezeulu, and an inscrutable deity like Ulu, that institutional weakness can create room for transgression as well as dissonance. The dissonance is manifested in the confusion, both on Ezeulu's part and Umuaro's, as to whether the decision not to eat the extra yam is indeed Ulu's and not Ezeulu's. Thus the very constitution of Ulu and the priesthood creates such

uncertainty for the Priest that deciphering the nature of the relationship requires an enormous expenditure of emotional labor, depressing his spirits greatly.

Indeed, that is not the first time the question of the Chief Priest's agency has surfaced in the history of Umuaro. It can be argued that Ezeulu's consideration of the problem is not only based on the structural ambiguity within the institutional practices of the worship and priesthood of Ulu, but also on his own concern as to how he measures up to his predecessors. He suffers from a particular form of anxiety of influence, as it were. His inferiority to his father over his lack of magical and medicinal knowledge has already been noted. Additionally, he is haunted by the legacy of his predecessors over the matter of effective leadership over the modernization of tradition. That anxiety is revealed in the following exchange with Akuebue when the latter expresses his anxiety at Umuaro's view that Ezeulu is too close to the Whiteman for a Chief Priest of Umuaro:

> "Did not my grandfather put a stop to *ichi* in Umuaro? […]" "He did it," said Akuebue. "What was Umuaro's reply to him? They cursed him. […] They said; how is *a man's endurance to be tested*? Today who asks such a question?" (133)

Ezeulu's predecessors demonstrate that one can lead in determining Ulu's way, exercising one's will rather than merely following a pre-determined path. So, Ezeulu's readiness to reinterpret tradition by sending his son to the Mission school is not unusual in this regard, but what is, apart from the difference of context, is the particular formation of trauma in his personality, which makes him defensive as well as apprehensive when making radical changes. The overall effect of his behavior is that it alienates the people from him.

Ezeulu's deep-seated fear of failure dictates that he should not only emulate his predecessors, but perhaps push the parameters radically further than they had. In this regard, like Olunde in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Ezeulu interrogates the efficacy of *ascriptive power*, asking himself whether he can transform the Chief Priest's relationship with Ulu, giving him even the power to say "no" to the deity. He is asking a fundamental question about his agency within the institution: "is it sufficient to be simply a means of the divine will or is there an agential role for the human carrier? That question does not only apply to Ezeulu, as a priest alone, but also to Umuaro as well: "does the nation have a role in determining its future or is everything to be left to Ulu?" As we will see in the next section, that is the key question that Umuaro is trying to resolve. As for Ezeulu, as he ruminates over the issue, he momentarily pulls away from the precipice of radical counter-identification with tradition and concludes: "No Chief Priest had ever refused. So, it could not be done. He would not dare." (Achebe 3) The statement suggests that much as Ezeulu has opened up a space of subversive thought, he cannot go ahead with it, for there is no reassuring legitimating precedence. He is aware that if he departs from tradition, he would be in unchartered waters and so would Umuaro.

It is into those same unchartered waters that Ezeulu's riposte to his other Self throws him:

> "Take away that word dare," he replied to this enemy. "Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet." (3)

In this respect, Ezeulu does not need precedence to be transgressive, as he is his own man, but the interior monologue does not affirm that view of himself, since it shows a certain vacillation between *identification* and *counter-identification* with tradition. Ezeulu is depicted as a

decentered subject, in the Lacanian sense, split between the *Symbolic* order, in his desire to conform to the *Law* of the father, and the *Imaginary* that unloosens the chain of closures enforced by the tradition. (Lacan 1-8) Ezeulu wishes to be an agent of change like his predecessors, but his personal inadequacy compels him to take the line of excessive exceptionalism. That is an example of a man whose lack of self-confidence constantly drives him into comparing himself to his predecessors and, perhaps, trying to outdo them as well, even seemingly foolishly. Ezeulu is haunted by the past.

It is that tendency that contributes to his refusal to eat the extra yam so he can announce the date of the New Yam Feast. That act has often been interpreted as a mark of his stubbornness and overweening pride. Whilst that is true to some extent, it is also important to bear in mind that within the ethical frame of the novel that is a contributory factor rather than the prime cause of Umuaro's final disaster. It is suggested that it is Ulu who enjoins his Chief Priest not to depart from tradition. Even his friend Akuebue, a man not given to flattering Ezeulu, attests to Ulu's hand in the matter. Thus, Ezeulu's seeming hubris does not determine the fundamental crisis in the novel, but rather it shapes the way others in the community interpret his actions, which diminishes his authority. What drives it is principally Ezeulu's desire to be a unique Chief Priest.

He achieves that by resolving the conflict between adherence to and breaking away from the past, by *working it out* in a contradictory, but original proposition: he is the same as and different from his predecessors. When the opportunity arises to go against Ulu by saving the nation and exercising the kind of transformative leadership he admires in his predecessors, he chooses not to do so. Although, his actions may appear irresponsible and largely facilitating the consolidation of colonial rule over Umuaro, it can nevertheless be argued that this is Ezeulu's moment of supreme identification with tradition. In going against the modernizing national

consensus, Ezeulu is exercising the kind of nomadic *deterritorializing* logic that is at the heart of Umuaro's collective consciousness and institutional practice--the will to exercise radical individualism when need be. Thus, he is being radical in his conservatism, since in the face of a ubiquitous desire for change, going against it is the only course open to a progressive Ezeulu. Ezeulu, both has his yam and eats it, so to speak! He simultaneously affirms tradition and rebels against it. He has performed the required adaptability of leadership that has historically been associated with the priesthood of Umuaro, but has done so uniquely.

He is different from his predecessors in that his radicalism contributes to the profound change of Umuaro. Whatever the content of that change, he ensures that it generally conforms to his intuition and plan on how to engage the Western presence. True, Ezeulu has violated his duty of care for his community by refusing to eat the extra yam. However, the most profound question the novel poses is: "would the nation have survived the onslaught of colonial rule had Ezeulu departed from tradition and eaten the extra yam?" Perhaps, it would have, but the balance of forces in the fictional universe of *Arrow of God* is evidently in favor of the Europeans. In such a context, Ezeulu's gesture may have only served to open up a rush for unregulated departure from tradition, without marking the moment of transition with its requisite ritual significance, which the crisis over the extra yam does. As Achebe puts it in his introduction to *The African Trilogy*: "had he been spared Ezeulu might have come to see his fate as perfectly consistent with his high historic destiny as a victim, consecrating by his agony […] the defection of his people." (vii)

In short, Ezeulu is a deeply troubled man as a consequence of some psychological childhood scars which are carried over to his performance of the priesthood of Ulu. The colonial situation exacerbates his condition. So too, as we will see in the following section, does the trauma underlying the national formation of Umuaro. Ezeulu *acts out* his personal and

professional trauma through his cantankerous adherence to the law of Umuaro and consequent violation of the norms of justice. However, it might be argued that faced with an encroaching colonial rule, on the one hand, and the disunity of Umuaro, on the other, he chooses to resolve the crisis by asserting firm loyalty to tradition rather than bowing to the forces of change which he had earlier sought to accommodate. That clarity of vision, in spite of its contribution to the demise of Ulu and the way of life of Umuaro, like Okonkwo's daring final blow in *Things Fall Apart*, must be seen as neither an elaboration of the tragic nor an expression of cultural conflict as such, but rather as the resolution of a traumatized life with a final assertion of the value of personal constancy and loyalty to the fundamentals of tradition. In that, he can be said to have transcended both the *historical* and *foundational trauma*s.

SEGMENTARISM, UMUARO'S FORMATION AND THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRATIC INDIVIDUALISM

Intriguingly, Achebe describes Winterbottom as an agent of "the powers of event" whom the gods use and then leave alone. (231) He and the whole colonial intrusion into Umuaro are a catalyst for the resurfacing of the *structural trauma* underlying the formation of Umuaro. Umuaro was formed out of a number of units which came together to ward off the deadly attacks from Abam, a powerful neighboring territory, during the era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Thus the foundation of Umuaro is the working out of that historical trauma inflected on the people by the threat of capture and enslavement. In this way, it is a memorial to the nation's effort at defending itself by instituting a much a more complex metaphysical, social and political structure. It is also a testimony to Umuaro's leadership, unity and imaginative capacity, all of which have resulted in the development of a territorial and socio-political organization adequate enough to meet the historical challenge. Its resourcefulness is encapsulated and secured in the

subordination of the various villages to the new deity Ulu and his priesthood. To borrow from Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Umuaro can be described as a *reterritorialization* of the diffuse and *deterritorialized* sub-nations that had fallen prey to better organized neighbors during the era of the slave trade. (132-133)

Nevertheless, the solution unwittingly stores up problems for the future, since the leadership is inherently in tension with other centers of power. The new polity is not an absolute erasure of differentiation and dispersal of power. It still retains its decentered and *deterritorialized* zone, for instance, the Idimili deity and priesthood are preserved, but subordinated loosely rather than firmly to the new leadership of Ulu and his Chief Priest. The decentering of power is further evident in the decision to assign the custodianship of the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest group. (Achebe 28). Clearly, Umuaro enshrines its anti-state or, *deterritorializing nomadic* logic at the core of its reformed political and social structure.[3] The production of power as a religious rather than secular formation equally contributes to uncertainty: whilst impeding the development of a secular centralized authority that is dissociated from the spiritual and ethical, it equally undermines the leader's authority by making his jurisdiction over the secular unclear and, therefore, potentially disputable.

Nevertheless, the system works effectively, protecting Umuaro, until the arrival of the Whiteman, when the balance between *reterritorialization* and *deterritorialization* shifts in favor of the latter. That delicate balance that had been struck between centralization and decentralization and which required the community to be equally sensitive to moments and sites of communal action and those of autonomy comes under pressure in the new dispensation. The decisions over war and peace are traditionally taken collectively, but there is now a shift as they are also being driven by sectional interests: for example, the decision to invade Okperi over the

land dispute, is manipulated by the ambitious business man, Nwaka, whose desire to undermine Ezeulu's authority is legitimized by Ezidimili, the priest of a minor, but historically important deity.

Historical memory too becomes a bone of contention. Ezeulu's objection to the war is based on the account received from his father and predecessor as Chief Priest, which holds that the Okperi people were the original inhabitants of the land and that they had given some of it and their deities to the people of Umuaro. He regards the disputed piece as Okperi's and counsels Umuaro not to fight, for Ulu will not aid them in "an unjust war." (16) His advice, which is presented as reasonable and befitting his office, is undermined by Nwaka's and Ezidimili's hitherto underground oppositional camp.

Nwaka's contestation of Ezeulu authority has to do with who is the ultimate authoritative source on the history of Umuaro. He questions Ezeulu's status as the custodian of national history on the apparently reasonable ground that there is no single inherently authoritative account about the founding of Umuaro. He says: "Wisdom is like a goatskin bag; every one carries his own. Knowledge of the land is also like that. Ezeulu has told us what his father told him." (16) Nwaka asserts the Igbo belief in the necessary co-existence of different perspectives to relativize Ezeulu's account, thereby denying its status as the authoritative statement of the representative of Ulu. Furthermore, he detaches Ezeulu from his official status as the Chief Priest by treating his account as private story passed from any father to a son. He remarks: 'But we know that the lore of land is beyond the knowledge of many fathers. […] "My father told me a different story." (17)

Achebe has often spoken, particularly in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, of how the idea of the essential multiplicity of truth is central to the Igbo belief system, epitomized in the proverb

that “wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it.” (91) In recasting these two contending narratives as a matter of opinion between his and Ezeulu’s family, Nwaka reduces Ezeulu’s status whilst promoting his own as equal to the latter’s. He does not stop there--he presents himself as more authoritative than Ezeulu, thus going beyond the axiom of the co-existence of truth and asserting that there are some truths such as his own which are more valid than others. The superiority of his version and authority is derived from his wealth, but primarily from the seniority of his village. In essence, Nwaka has taken advantage of the ambiguity over hierarchy in the constitution of Umuaro to undermine the unexpressed, but shared understanding about how power works in Umuaro, within which the Chief Priest has certain authority, but without lording it over the nation.

It is also noteworthy that Nwaka ascribes the validity of his position to the traditional principle of the absolute separation of power between the religious and the secular. In his view Ezeulu is transgressing the limits of his religious authority by commenting on the land issue. As he puts it: “If Ezeulu had spoken about the great deity of Umuaro which he carries and which his fathers carried before him I would have paid attention to his voice. But he speaks about events which are older than Umuaro itself.” (17) Furthermore, when Ezeulu, in asserting his authority condemns the decision to go to war, Nwaka tells his supporters that: “My father did not tell me that before Umuaro went to war it took leave from the Priest of Ulu. […] The man who carries a deity is not king.” (28)

For Nwaka, what is at stake here is the very constitution of power in Umuaro, which is of more concern to him than the external threats from Okperi as well as the colonial government. He sees Ezeulu as a greater threat to Umuaro, since he suspects him of harboring the unification of religious and secular powers. That perception reawakens the suppressed fear of monarchical

rule. Nwaka observes that "[Ezeulu] is a man of ambition; he wants to be the King, priest, all." (28). It is significant that Nwaka reads Ezeulu's alleged ambition genealogically rather than as a personal trait. He says: "His father, they said, was like that too. But Umuaro showed him that the Igbo people knew no kings. The time has come to tell his son also." (28) In other words, the tension between the secular and the religious does not arise solely because of colonialism or Ezeulu's character and actions – it is markedly *historical and foundational*.

Evidently, there is the suggestion, at least from Nwaka and his supporters, that leadership in these changed times should perhaps be allotted on the basis of economic power rather than the custodianship of religious authority and, if so, it is Nwaka who should assume the role of a leader. He tells his supporters: "If Umuaro decided to have a king we know where he would come from. Since when did Umuachala become the head of the six villages? We all know that it was jealousy among the big villages that made them give the priesthood to the weakest." (28) Clearly, Nwaka's desire is to return Umuaro to its pre-formation under the guise of restraining Ezeulu from his alleged ambition for more power. Achebe suggests that it is Nwaka and Ezidimili rather than Ezeulu who are ambitious. They are more concerned about the status of the priesthood of Umuaro than the threat of the encroaching British rule which, like that of the Abam slave-raiding warriors before, requires exceptional leadership, unity and, perhaps, the invention of a new countervailing metaphysical system. For Achebe, it is here that the rain begins to fall on Umuaro and symbolically on pre-colonial Africa. He demonstrates how the lack of visionary leadership, unity and enabling institutional capacity for resistance may have contributed to the successful imposition of colonial rule and Western culture.

However, though it is true that this crisis is caused by the return of the founding *deterritorializing* force of Umuaro, it is not in itself a *deterritorialization* against the real and

impending hegemonic structure, but rather a displacement of the real conflict, that is, between Umuaro and European colonialism, onto the plane of the founding of Umuaro. In this manner, the *foundational trauma* makes Umuaro misrecognize the true character of the historical conjuncture, disabling the kind of imaginative capacity that had worked well against Abam. It may also be understood as a reification of the concrete relations of the production of power in the contemporary formation into an abstract disquisition on the history of power within the formation. That is in fact an attempt at *reterritorialization* of the acephalous nation rather *deterritorialization* or, perhaps, a *deterritorialization-as-reterritorialization*. It is an instance of the Deleuzian *nomadic* impulse not necessarily functioning as an instrument of democratization, but of the will to power. (409--415) It can be said that the section led by Nwaka, and which seems to be stronger than Ezeulu's, reenacts what might be described as the trauma of the primal loss of power as a way of overcoming the current crisis. In failing to *work through* the original trauma within the traditional *transcendental*, they facilitate the imposition of an external solution to Umuaro's problems. The acephalous values of Umuaro will no longer be the measure of value in this new world, but those of the State-like and Christian British Empire.

It is also striking that the kind of political structure Nwaka hankers after, based on a hierarchical power structure of the villages constituting Umuaro, has a greater potential of being easily absorbed into the proposed structure of Indirect Rule than the existing one which is non-hierarchical. Consciously or otherwise, Nwaka is desiring a point of entry into the colonial order and when he suggests that should Umuaro want a King, they are mostly likely to turn to his village where he is the dominant figure, it is most evident that he is guilty of the very thing, of which he is accusing Ezeulu. Although, Igbo tradition values individualism, Nwaka's case would appear to mark the limits of its permissibility, for it violates that fine balance between autonomy

and subordination to the interests of the collective and proposes to resolve the *transhistorical trauma* through political recidivism. Ironically, that political structure, which had been discarded by the Igbo, is revalorized as a sign of a privileged progressive modernity in the new order. According to Achebe, that profound inversion of values from the indigenous to the Western *transcendental* is a major source of the historical disorientation that feeds into the *cognitive and affective deformation of the Post-colonial subject and project*.

EZEULU AS THE FAITHFUL SUBJECT OF UMUARO AND THE POST-COLONIAL FUTURE

It is noticeable that, whilst others respond to the presence of colonial rule by seeking to return to the past, Ezeulu's sights are trained on the present and the future. He grasps the enormity of the task facing Umuaro and confronts the emergent *transcendental* from within. However, when that solution is betrayed, he decides to force a resolution of the *foundational trauma* as well as the historical one produced by the advent of colonialism by driving his society into the direction of change he had originally envisaged, but he does so from a conservative position. Thus, he rises to the historical as well as *transhistorical* task through a hybrid identification with the new order, but the process of instituting this approach involves a strategic attack on his internal enemies, which makes him come across as ruthless, but, in doing so, he ensures that Umuaro's break with tradition and adoption of the new symbolic order is elevated to an epic confrontation, the price of which is Umuaro's loss of its Chief Priest, deity, and territorial integrity. He raises the plane of confrontation from the secular to the metaphysical level that concludes with his ritual suicide, and perhaps Ulu's too. (Adéeko, 73-74) So, it is quintessentially the tragi-epic representational form that is employed to resolve the main conflict, the *foundational and the historical trauma*, in the novel, but the tragic here is not the linear classical model – it is multidirectional. By raising

the stakes to the highest metaphysical level, Ezeulu ensures that the moment of transition is an historical rupture of the existing order, a truly Badiouan event from which he emerges as the *faithful subject* of Umuaro's history and being. (69) Achebe considers that as Ezeulu's fulfilment of his "high historic destiny." What is the trajectory that leads to this point?

Initially, Ezeulu's idea is to circumvent both passivity as well as direct confrontation with the new opponent, largely because either position is doomed to failure. The first is unworkable because it is fatalistic and the second because it would lead to the sort of violent destruction visited upon Abame. (86) His office endows him with a special ability to see deeply into things; he tells Akuebue: "I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am known and at times I am unknowable." (133) His strategy can be described as a form of *strategic identification* with the enemy. Significantly, his view is grounded in relevant indigenous knowledge, demonstrating that Umuaro is a society with an archive of usable knowledge, which undermines his opponent's accusation that his strategy is contrary to tradition. He opts to have a member of his family within the new group, whilst he himself and his family remain outside it. He recognizes that his world is different from that of his predecessors, that there is a new world in formation and its *transcendental* is increasingly becoming the measure of all things. As the well-travelled Unachukwu testifies: "I saw with my own eyes what the white man did to Abame. Then I knew there was no escape. As daylight chases away darkness so will the white man drive away all our customs." (86) So Ezeulu decides that a strategic engagement with the new forces would perhaps give him an upper hand and so he sends his son to the Christian Mission. As he tells his son:

> "The world is changing […] I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-enti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: 'Men of

> today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.' I want one of my sons to join [the Church] people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share." (47)

Clearly, Ezeulu's collaboration with the forces of Western culture can be described as strategic and subversive. The question he is asking himself, is: "how does a leader and his people respond when they are faced with the threat to their way of life and their metaphysical order by an opponent with patently superior coercive and ideological forces?" His approach is not based just on his own understanding, but indigenous knowledge as well. Moreover, his strategic collaboration is not a will to power or self-aggrandizement, but part of the indigenous epistemic requirement for adaptability in times of radial change. Like the proverbial bird, Ezeulu must modify his ways so he cannot be undermined or destroyed by the new technologies of power. It is significant that indigenous knowledge is shown to offer a method for engaging unwelcome external intrusion.

It also provides for the adoption of multiple perspectives on any object of knowledge. In order to legitimize his position, Ezeulu further draws upon traditional knowledge, remarking that: "[t]he world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well do not stand in one place." (47) We might read that as a call for an open and multi-perspectival approach to the world. Hence, Ezeulu is perfectly justified in sending his son to the Mission, so that through him he can see the mask dancing at close quarters also in going beyond his traditional role of religious leadership and engaging in secular politics. In this regard, Nwaka's suspicion takes on a new significance; he is aware that Ezeulu is responding to the new times by engaging their secular as well as spiritual dimensions, constituting himself as the central agent of total rather than partial

resistance, an effective leader defining a future or line of productive flight from the current crisis for his people. (Deleuze and Guattari 157)

The difference between the two is that Nwaka is the conservative vehicle of a *foundational trauma*. His choice of the indeterminacy of truth seems in the end to be a privileging of his own version of history which is deployed in the service of recovering the power his village lost. Thus, epistemological arbitrariness, which in some circumstances can be a positive force for liberation from dominant knowledges, in this context serves to undermine traditional authority for the reconstitution of an alternative power base committed to self-promotion and sectional interests rather than to communal well-being. In this respect, we might say, with Alain Badiou, that, as an agent of historical change, Nwaka represents *the obscure* subject whereas Ezeulu that of *the faithful subject* (Badiou 62-64).3 As such, Ezeulu situates himself in terms of the historical scale of transformative agency – he is the *Spartacus or Toussaint L'ouverture* figure seen by Badiou as the bearer of the transhistorical revolutionary energy, one who refuses to be overwhelmed by history and resurrects a contestatory procedure of truth which effects a rupture with the everyday politics of the contemporary, producing an event of epochal magnitude. (Badiou 64) He is able to deploy unconventional strategies for dealing with the colonial presence, which entails neither radically changing his society nor absolutely identifying with the new forces.

If his explanation to Oduche as to why he is sending him to a Mission school is in terms of *strategic identification* with a perceived emergent hegemony, his report to Akuebue marks him out not only as strategic, but also as deeply committed to the well-being of Umuaro. He observes that:

> "A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make a charm we look for the

> animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it we look for a goat or a ram; if that is not sufficient we send for a bull. But sometimes even a bull does not suffice, then we must look for a human. Do you think it is the sound of the death-cry gurgling through blood that we want to hear? No, my friend, we do it because we have reached the very end of things." (134)

However, Nwaka, the *obscure subject*, cannot comprehend what the Chief Priest of Ulu has grasped, that Umuaro has "reached the very end of things," whereby the nation must dig deeper in order to face up sufficiently to the unprecedented challenge by employing the founding methodology of Umuaro, based on leadership, unity, and the reinvention of the polity. We are told that in order to drive away the Abam warriors, the ancestors carried out an exceptional act of human sacrifice and restructured their political territory and created a new deity to match the needs of the time. (15-16)

In the same way, Ezeulu treats the new disease with an exceptional medicine, the sacrifice of his own son, Oduche. Thus, collaboration is a form of exceptional sacrifice, as the countering of loss with exceptional loss in order to transcend the moment of crisis. There are intertextual biblical references here to Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac, which suggests Achebe's use of his Christian background to illuminate the African past. The question then is whether or not Ezeulu's exceptional medicine will be effective. In the end it is not, for a number of reasons. First, the importance attached to individuality in Igbo culture means that Oduche is socially allowed not simply to adhere to what he has been asked to do. Achebe tells us in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that at the root of the Igbo world view is the "belief in the fundamental worth and independence of every man and of his right to speak on matters of

concern to him and flowing from it, a rejection of any form of absolutism which might endanger those values." (10) Significantly, when he sends Oduche to school he reasons with him carefully, explaining the nature and purpose of the mission he is to undertake and it is said that he spoke to him as "a man would speak his best friend." (47) It is that space of an honorary adult that enables Oduche to re-interpret the mission and counter-identify with the agency his father has stipulated for him.

He is also subject to ideological *interpellation* by the new religion: he comes to measure his life in terms of the new *transcendental* and, as such, his loyalty to his father and his community diminishes to the point of absolute identification with the new order and counter-identification with the old one.4 That is amply illustrated by his attempt to kill the python and also by his failure to warn his father that the Christians are undermining Ulu's will by encouraging people to offer the New Yam to their God. (222-223) It is also suggested, especially in his decision to kill the python, that his naivety is taken advantage of by the new overzealous preacher. There is another model of African Christianity he could have chosen – that of moderation represented by the Igbo carpenter Unachukwu. Achebe is careful not to portray Oduche's attack on the sacred python as representative of the whole Christian community's approach to traditional culture, for if it were, it would be a much simpler structure of a Manichean dichotomy between Western culture as evil and the indigenous one as perfect and Achebe seems decidedly against such simplification of history. As in the case of Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe complicates the position of the new convert and the ideology of the church. Thus, the problem is that Oduche's wish not to be thought less committed entraps him in a fundamentalist wing of his organization, which contributes to the negligence of his mission. Thus the pragmatic context of Oduche's performance of his mission transforms his role from that

of a strategic and efficacious sacrifice into an agent of an unthinking collaboration and extension of the new order into Umuaro. In this way, Ezeulu's human sacrifice proves ineffective and contributes significantly to undermining his authority over Umuaro. Umuaro has indeed "reached the very end of things" when even a human sacrifice cannot do!

There is public opposition against Ezeulu's engagement with the Whiteman, straining relations within Umuaro generally and within his own family particularly. His eldest son is worried that his father may have been motivated by the desire to ensure that Oduche is out of the line of succession to the priesthood after his demise, leaving the youngest son by his favorite wife to succeed him. As Akuebue informs Ezeulu, he, like many people in Umuaro, is displeased by his decision. Thus, when Oduche commits the sacrilege of suffocating the python, whose custodial Priest is Ezidimili, Ezeulu's arch-rival and Nwaka's sponsor, Ezeulu's certainty in his capacity for good judgement is substantially undermined. He can either admit his decision was misguided and become a laughingstock, playing into his enemies' scheme of undermining him, or he can salvage something out of it. Ezidimili's unnecessary public ordering of Ezeulu to purify the land, something that Ezeulu is well aware of as his duty, irks him, but also reminds him of how much his placement of Oduche at the Mission is loathed, making him more intransigent. At this point, it becomes clear that Ezeulu's strategy for dealing with colonialism is to a large extent being undermined by the *foundational trauma* of the founding of Umuaro, as he is not allowed any room for maneuver. The issue is then: "how does a leader, such as Ezeulu, lead the charge effectively against a common enemy when his very authority is destabilized from within his community primarily because a previous epochal crisis had not been fully resolved?"

The loss of support from the body politic curtails Ezeulu's effort to intervene by publicly-stated policy, as his concern shifts to his own fate and that of his deity. That brings to the fore the

shadow that hangs over Ulu and his priesthood throughout the novel, that is, their fate should they be proven unhelpful to Umuaro. When deliberating on the possibility of going to war with Okperi, Nwaka more than hints at the fact that if Ulu does not aid them, he might be replaced. He tells is supporters: "We have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbors and set fire on him." (28) Having failed to heed Ezeulu's advice, Umuaro loses the war and Ezeulu is vindicated, but it is implied in the novel that Nwaka and Ezidimili are smarting from their wounds and that they might yet carry out their threat. In this regard, Ezeulu's and Ulu's ability to defend Umuaro's interests are under intense scrutiny. Ulu's failure to help the nation during the war, Ezeulu's testimony against his people in Winterbottom's court, and his decision to send his son to the Whiteman's school contribute to Umuaro's perception that the Chief Priest is a sellout. Furthermore, Ulu's efficacy is doubtful as he does not punish Nwaka when he publicly challenges him during his clan's festival. Moreover, he does not destroy Winterbottom when he arrests Ezeulu. As the narrative unfolds, the evidence against the priest and his deity grows, creating the potential for their being set aside.

Ezeulu is cognizant of the fact and that begins to affect his psyche. Whilst in prison he has a nightmare or what is described in the novel as 'a vision' in which he is stopped from addressing a gathering of the elders by Nwaka who says that Ulu has outlived his usefulness, since he will not protect them from the Whiteman. He suggests that they get rid of him as the people of Aninta had done with theirs. (160-161) The dream is evidence that what has hitherto been an external political problem is now affecting Ezeulu's mental health. Roger Luckhurst calls attention to trauma as an encoding of the confusion between the inside and outside. (3) The choice remaining for Ezeulu is between giving up and letting Nwaka and Ezidimili run the show

or fighting them and protecting his position, that of his deity, and ultimately that of Umuaro. He chooses the latter. In a telling statement he says:

> Now he looked at it again and more closely and one thing stood out. His quarrel with the white man was insignificant beside the matter he must settle with his own people. For years he had been warning Umuaro not to allow a few jealous men to lead them into the bush. […] They had gone on taking one dangerous step after another and now they had gone too far. […] Now the fight must take place, for until a man wrestles with those who make a path across his homestead the others will not stop. (162)

In this statement, Ezeulu, like Nwaka, has forgotten the traditional advice that one should "chase the wild cat first before blaming the chicken." As Ezeulu trains his anger at his own people, though he is understandably provoked into such action, his focus undoubtedly shifts from facing the danger posed by Western encroachment to that by his internal opponents. Seemingly, he has been entrapped in the *obscure subject*'s project and lost sight of his historical mission. Often Ezeulu's refusal to eat the extra yam is seen as the most manifest symptom of his arrogance. Nevertheless, eating the yam or not is not the real question in the novel. It is about how Ezeulu and Umuaro can *work through* the trauma of the foundation of the polity in order to survive the colonial onslaught. In that fight, as Ezeulu perceptively observes, the Whiteman is incidental and if Umuaro does not resolve that problem, their fate will be in the hands of any enemy, White or Black. However, in the pragmatic balance of forces, there is no way Ezeulu can win that fight against the Whiteman alone without his people. He is in this respect a sovereign without a supporting body. He needs to mobilize his people to challenge the invading forces and to do so

he has to assert his and Ulu's power over them, by raising the site of the conflict to a metaphysical level. This way of looking at the novel departs substantially from Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* which argues that Ezeulu sets the conflict on the secular rather than metaphysical plane. (94) Clearly, he does.

He proceeds by highlighting the people's dependency on Ulu and he does so by resisting the pressure to counter-identify with tradition by eating the extra yam that he has accumulated because of his incarceration. It can be argued that Ezeulu attempts to awaken the people of Umuaro to the importance of their belief system at a moment it is being undermined by growing cynicism towards, and disrespect for, the deity and his Chief Priest led by Nwaka. The community is more interested in yams than their long term future; and there is evidence that their relationship with Ulu is couched in the logic of commodity exchange that uncannily resembles Western Capitalism which accompanies colonial rule. The impression is given that they could have their yams blessed by any deity that could do so with some semblance of legitimacy. Thus, the worship of Ulu is reduced to use value. That seems to rob the institution of Ulu of its metaphysical attributes and authority. For Achebe, it is that loss of respect for the indigenous belief system that deeply undermines Umuaro's capacity to resist and overcome the forces of colonialism.

It is for Umuaro's renewal that Ezeulu, who has been a progressive leader right from the beginning, becomes a radical conservative. When, in order to change his mind, the community reminds him of the customs that have previously been discarded, such as the abandonment of the kingship title, he is not in the mood to listen, for the very people advising him had criticized his decision to send his son to school and had done so for sectional rather than national interests. So what we need to ask is "why is a man who starts off as a progressive leader and who is anxious

to match, if not overtake, the achievements of his progressive predecessors suddenly become conservative? It can be argued that the titanic battle that ensues between Ezeulu and his people serves as a way of *working out the trauma* at the base of Umuaro. Ulu and the Chief Priest assert themselves, minimizing the destructive aspects of *acephalousness* and uniting the people through their suffering. In which case Ulu acts as *The Old Testament* God who is capable of punishing his people's disloyalty by giving them up to conquest and capture. Ezeulu's decision not to eat the extra yam is supported by his consultations with Ulu, negating the suggestion that it is purely motivated by his desire for vengeance.

For his pains, Ezeulu is punished and abandoned by Ulu. He robs him of his favorite son, Obika, who dies of a mysterious ailment. However, the overall logic is that Ulu has used Ezeulu as his arrow and left him where he fell. It can also be contended that by asserting his priestly agency and forcing the issue in the fight between, on the one hand, himself and Ulu and on the other, Ezidimili and Nwaka, Ezeulu wrings out the truth from the historical conjuncture, foregrounding the fact that Ulu has been superseded and, with that, the people can choose another deity, but not on their terms, such as those of exchange value, but in a logic constructed by the Priest of Ulu – that of *strategic hybridity*. Ezeulu, indirectly, but wittingly, forces Umuaro to befriend the Whiteman. As he says earlier in the novel, "my spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will say *had we known tomorrow*." (47) Both Ulu and his priest are allowed the space to withdraw without embarrassment: Ezeulu in his madness is completely oblivious to Umuaro's pledge to the new deity and Ulu never really makes any appearance after breaking off communication with his Chief Priest. It is also noticeable that the emerging Christianity includes the Igbo ritual of the New Yam Feast, which makes it syncretic rather a complete eradication of indigenous culture. Thus, by saying "no" to both Colonial Indirect Rule

and the superficial adaptation of indigenous tradition proposed by the Elders--that would have been the case if he had gone against tradition and eaten the extra yam, Ezeulu forces Umuaro into a strategic accommodation of the new religion, which had informed his plan to send Oduche to the Mission school. However, that has been at a huge cost to Umuaro – it has lost its soul and bearings.

In order to achieve his plan, Ezeulu goes beyond human sacrifice and commits ritual suicide. Adélékè Adéeko has insightfully located Ezeulu's death in a pattern of ritual suicide as a resolution to the conflict between African societies and an advancing colonial hegemony. (73-74). However, rather than being a device of narrative closure and the demise of the preceding elite, as he suggests, we may also look at it as a site of reproduction and translation, of what Olaniyan defines as a *prognostic essence* of transformative suicide. (105) More than that, Ezeulu's goal has been to heal the trauma of the foundation of the nation whose persistence has made Umuaro constitutionally weak and vulnerable. Faced with possible starvation, Umuaro seems determined to survive through the adoption of a new and seemingly more powerful deity. That resolves both the foundational and historical traumas and even Ezeulu's personal one, but like the primal solution, it also engenders new pathologies which will be most visible in the Post-colonial formation.

CONCLUSION

So, in *Arrow of God*, Achebe re-enacts the trauma of colonization, not simply in order to resymbolize and repeat it, but *work through it*. From his location in Post-colonial modernity, he discharges his duty to his ancestors not with a simple narrative of filiation, but one that uncovers a complex history of self-destruction as well as enormous resources for agency and capacity for resistance. He is located where Oduche was, but differently. He is the colonized who has gone

through the trauma of loss to the other side and emerged with the full measure of what was lost and how it can be retrieved. He abstracts a new *indigenous transcendental* from the hybrid world produced by the colonial order, in which the relationship between the colonial and the indigenous is revalorized in favor of the latter, so that Ezeulu, his community, and their gods can be represented in terms of the index of the local rather than the colonial.

NOTES

1. This is a reference to the title of a founding text of Post-colonial theory. Also, I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their helpful comments and also Professors David Murphy and Angela Smith for the invitation to speak at Stirling University where I first sketched out the ideas in this paper.

2. Deleuze and Guattari rely on Anthropological studies of acephalous societies. In using the concept in Achebe's representation of the Igbo political system, one is perhaps repatriating the concept to the African context.

3. According to Badiou, the *faithful subject* is one who embodies the *transhistorical* capacity to say, "no" to domination, whereas the *obscure subject* is characterised by pettiness of motivation.

4. The term *interpellate* is borrowed from Althusser.

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